

THE RONNING MISSIONS - MARCH AND JUNE 1966Ronning Revs Up

Chester Ronning's "unofficial" trip to the Orient on behalf of peace was proposed by the Canadians in late January 1966. It evoked formal U.S. support and unvoiced U.S. trepidations. A Sinologist and retired diplomat, Ronning was known to hold a critical view of U.S. policies toward China and Vietnam. He hoped to visit Peking and Hanoi, relying for his welcome in China on a long-standing invitation from Ch'en Yi, with whom he had friendly relations, and Hanoi on his bearing Pearson's answer to Ho Chi Minh's letter of January 24.

Both Washington and our Embassy in Ottawa guessed an ulterior motive for the trip: Canadian Foreign Minister Paul Martin wanted to test the wind for changes in Canadian policy on Chinese representation in the UN, possible recognition of Communist China, and, more generally, a demonstration that Canada was not a U.S. "satellite." Under the circumstances (the 37 day bombing pause was still running), there seemed no proper response other than encouragement, even though the U.S. doubted the mission would produce much. (1/27/66, 2/4/66, 2/25/66)

By February 24, Peking had refused to issue Ronning a visa (2/24/66), and the reason is not difficult to guess. Ronning's itinerary and intention to visit Hanoi would have shown Peking that he hoped to play the mediator between NVN and the U.S. Chinese Communist policy insisted that the war be fought until the U.S. was defeated. Nevertheless, the DRV permitted him to come and, during his stay (March 7-11) gave him access to a number of high officials.

The March Visit: "Talks" in Exchange for a Bombing Cessation

Ronning characterized the results of his March 7-11 visit with an old Chinese saying: he had "travelled ten thousand miles to present a feather." (3/15/66) Although treated with deference,\* he was unable to move the DRV leaders from their insistence on the "Four Points" as the only basis for a peaceful settlement. They felt confident of keeping up their end of the war. (They expected destruction of Hanoi and Haiphong, they said, and were evacuating women and children, dispersing factories and offices, etc.) When Ronning protested their "Four Points" as tantamount to U.S. surrender, their attitude seemed to be "that's America's problem." (3/15/66)

Toward the end of Ronning's 2-hour interview with Pham Van Dong, however, he was told that DRV willingness to enter into some form of preliminary contact hinged on a commitment by the U.S. to cease "bombing"

\* It was received by the DRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, the Vice Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, Col. Ha Van Lau (IWA liaison to the ICC) and, on his last day, Pham Van Dong.



and all acts of war against North Vietnam" "unconditionally and for good." \*  
 It was not clear whether a public declaration or something more confidential was demanded, nor what the nature of the consequent contacts would be. Pham Van Dong refused to be drawn out, saying only: "Our position includes many aspects. In brief, we can say that informal talks and a cessation of attacks against North Vietnam go together." (3/20/66)

Ronning felt that a U.S. response was desired. The importance of secrecy was stressed to him. When earlier feelers had become public, the DRV had been forced to deny them, he was told.

#### Arranging the Second Trip: Canada in the Middle

Ronning's report aroused little enthusiasm in Washington, which:

- --Felt that any U.S. de-escalation should be reciprocated by military de-escalation on the other side.

- --Feared that a bombing halt would be interpreted to mean U.S. acceptance of Hanoi's Four Points.\*\* (4/26/66)

Martin, however, felt strongly that the channel should be kept active and pressed Washington personally and through channels to respond. In what may have been a veiled form of pressure, he informed Washington that his Government "did have important information of which it was the sole possessor." (4/22/66, 4/26/66)

By May 1, Washington had prepared a "new" message for Ronning, restating its willingness to talk without conditions, or to de-escalate mutually, to communicate with Hanoi directly or via intermediaries, etc. (4/30/66)

When Ottawa approached Hanoi about a return visit by Ronning, it was criticized by the North Vietnamese for failing to distinguish between aggressor and victim, and of advancing proposals not conforming to the 1954 Geneva accords, etc. Toward the end of May, it obtained grudging permission for Ronning to come along, however. (5/24/66)

\* Ronning was promised an Aide-Memoire on Pham's remarks, but was subsequently told that he had "misunderstood" and no such paper would be forthcoming. In his written summary of the conversation, Ronning used quotation marks in the manner reproduced here. Presumably, he felt confident he was accurately repeating Pham's language.

\*\* In his January 24, 1966, letter to heads of state, Ho had demanded that the U.S. "accept the four-point stand of the DRV Government and prove this by actual deeds; it must end unconditionally and for good all bombing raids and other acts of war against the DRV."



June Visit: No Movement by Either Side

Ronning visited Hanoi a second time, June 14-17, 1966, with even more disappointing results than in March.

He was told that Pham Van Dong was not then in Hanoi, and the highest official to receive him was Nguyen Duy Trinh, Foreign Minister and Vice Premier. Trinh expressed disappointment that the message being carried was so "similar to newspaper reports with which the DRV was already familiar." Ronning, looking back a week later, felt "totally depressed following his conversation with Trinh" and did not detect "any hint on Trinh's part of a desire to put forward any new or alternative proposals." (6/21/66)

. The main points made by Trinh were:

--There would be no military reciprocity for a bombing halt.

--The Canadians were abetting the U.S. "peace offensive" by appearing to mediate when they had nothing new to contribute--and doing so in a period (since March) when the U.S. was "escalating." When Ronning offered to withdraw, though, Trinh asked that the Canadian channel remain available.

--The Four Points were not mentioned per se, but their contents and the NLF Five Points were stressed as elements the U.S. would have to accept eventually.

~~--Neither the Four nor the Five Points were preconditions for "talks", however. If the U.S. stopped bombing completely, the DRV would talk.~~  
(6/21/66)

Although Ronning saw no promising new approach that might be offered the DRV at that time, Martin clearly wished to maintain the Canadian channel and seemed determined to find some role for Canadian peace-making efforts in the future. (6/23/66)

General Topics Raised During Ronning's Contacts

The following are topics raised with Ronning which also appear frequently during other negotiating sequences.

"Talks" vs "Negotiations"

Bundy visited Ottawa on June 21 to review Ronning's experiences with Ronning, Martin and other Canadians. As he cabled back, they concluded that "the total DRV comment appeared to add up to there being a



satisfactory prior understanding, before 'negotiations' as to (1) our recognition of the status of the NLF (not spelled out); (2) return to the 1954 Agreements; (3) withdrawal of US forces (not specified whether this must take place prior to negotiations or as to the ultimate result); (4) the Four Points." In distinction to these conditions for negotiations, "the DRV reps did say categorically that acceptance of the Four Points was not a necessary condition to preliminary talks. The only condition for such preliminary talks is our unilateral cessation of bombing. However, ...this appears to relate only to resumption of Rangoon-type contact, and as to any substantive negotiations the Four Points are still in the picture." (6/21/66)

#### "Permanent and Unconditional"

On Ronning's first visit, the North Vietnamese indicated a willingness to talk if "the bombing and all other acts of war" were unilaterally ceased "unconditionally and for good." This statement clearly contained two qualifiers: no reciprocity from Hanoi and no threat of resumption. Ronning, however, was not told that Hanoi would only "talk." The two qualifiers taken together were sufficient, but that they both were necessary was not clear. Ronning never tested this. Trinh, in January 1967, dropped the "permanent" qualifier, but at the same time, made it plain that a U.S. bombing cessation would buy only "talks."

#### "Peace Offensives vs. Military Offensives"

The timing of Ronning's second visit--mid-June--was awkward for the U.S., as it was planned to bomb POL facilities through the DRV, including Hanoi, at just that time. Such an attack would be difficult to reconcile with our support for Ronning's mission. (5/9/66, 6/3/66, 6/15/66). An attempt to circumvent this problem was made by delaying the strikes but seeking the earliest possible report from Ronning on Hanoi's response. (6/17/66) Ronning, however, had been told to report only to Ottawa, upon his return. (6/17/66, 6/18/66) Furthermore, Martin specifically asked us not to "escalate" in the period just after Ronning's return for fear that this would "jeopardize Canadian good faith with Hanoi and make it appear the U.S. used Ronning as a means of obtaining a negative readout on negotiations which would justify escalation." (6/20/66) In effect, the Canadian initiative seemed to require that we not escalate just before, during or just after contacts with Hanoi. Moreover, Martin wished to maintain a continuing dialogue with Hanoi. The POL system was attacked toward the end of June.

#### Secrecy

The North Vietnamese repeatedly stressed the importance of keeping their contacts secret and repeatedly complained of leaks to the press. (6/21/66) To illustrate the gravity of the matter, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs told Moore (the Canadian ICC representative) that the La Pira peace feeler had been genuine, but that Hanoi had had to denounce it when it leaked.. (6/8/66)



On the other hand, an Eastern European Embassy in Hanoi briefed Ruffacelli, the AFP correspondent there, on the content of Ronning's June exchanges with relative accuracy. The French Embassy in Washington and Americans assumed that the information had been passed with DRV approval, without satisfactorily resolving the question of DRV motives in providing this leak.

#### Reunification

The subject of reunifying the two Vietnams was broached to Moore on one of his routine visits to Hanoi early in June, 1966, by Ha Van Lau. The main point stressed by Lau was that "After the fighting stops, there should be a fairly long interval, during which the status quo continues with the two countries divided at the 17th parallel.... After that, it would be possible to see whether there were some changed ideas in Saigon and Hanoi." (6/8/66) When Ronning visited Hanoi, later that month, the subject was not emphasized by the Vietnamese, but was raised in the context of observing the 1954 Geneva Agreements. (6/21/66)

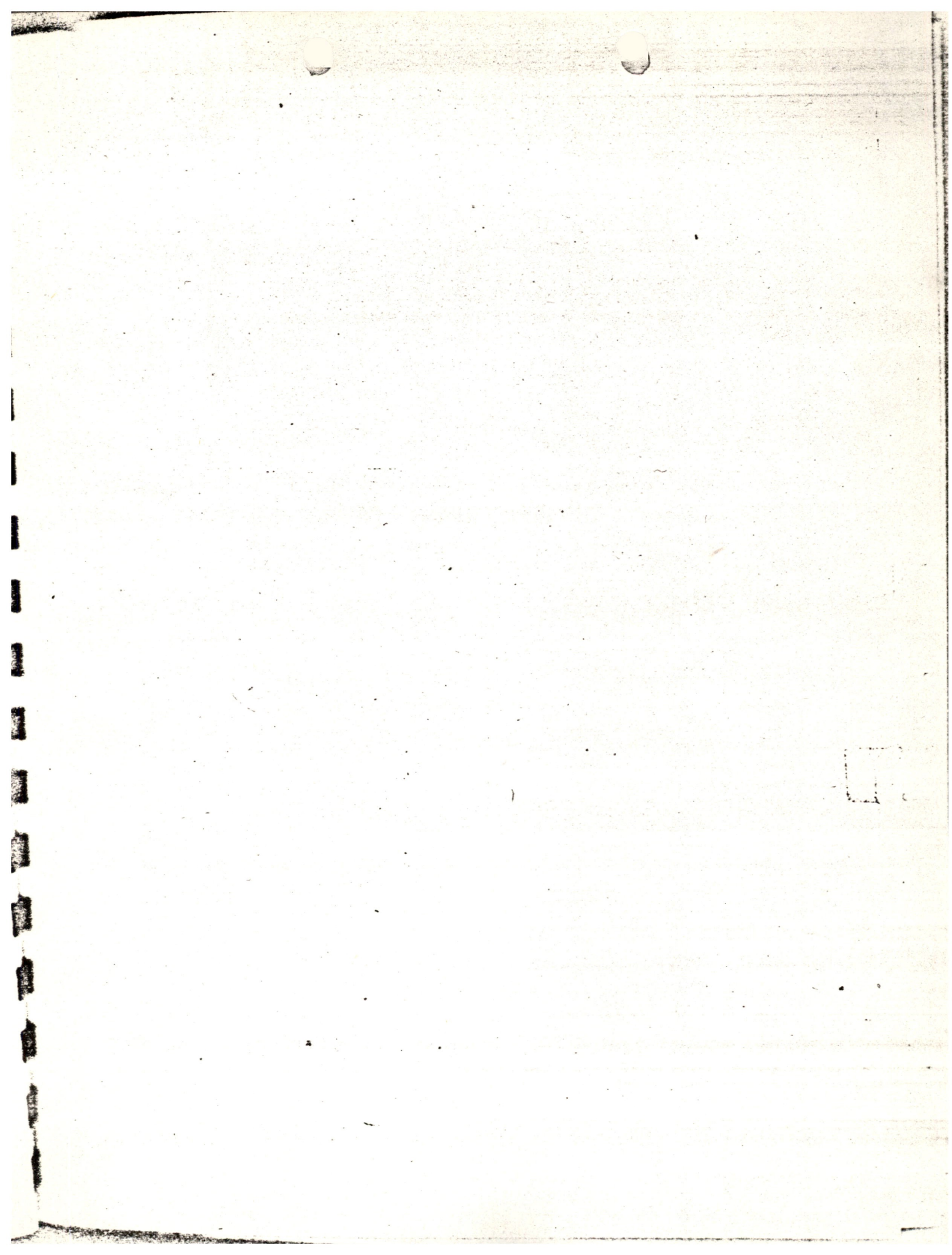
#### POW's

The U.S. asked Ronning to scout the possibility of exchanging prisoners of war with the DRV or providing them with ICRC protection. (5/15/66) Hanoi's reply was that POW's were "criminals" under DRV law and no ICRC role would be considered. He was given no detailed information about the prisoners themselves. (6/23/66)

#### Another Geneva Conference?

In the event of negotiations beginning, DRV officials indicated to Ronning that they would consider a Geneva-type conference on Vietnam and observed that they would favor French participation. With some prodding from an Ottawa colleague, Ronning reconstructed the following as a possible sequence: (1) an end to the U.S. bombing on DRV terms; (2) informal bilateral DRV-U.S. talks; (3) a multilateral Geneva-type conference. (6/21/66)







January 27, 1966

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION; Participants: H. E. Charles S. A. Ritchie, Ambassador of Canada, Mr. Chester Ronning, former Canadian Ambassador, Mr. William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, and Mr. Paul H. Kreisberg, FE/ACA.

"....

"...Ronning said he was without illusions on the likelihood of any success from this mission but thought it was worth a try. He said the Canadian line would be to express surprise at Peking's and Hanoi's opposition to a conference in view of their participation in the Laos conference.

"....

"Ronning then inquired about the position of the NLF.

"Mr. Bundy reviewed the U.S. position on the NLF, stressing that we are prepared to have them present in some form at a conference but not in full status as a 'party' but anything short of that we would be prepared to consider. He...stressed that acknowledgment of full status for the NLF would be pre-judging the right of the NLF to participate in a future government in South Vietnam. He noted that the NLF program called for the Front to have a main role in a coalition government and said that to admit this would quite frankly lead to their ultimate victory...."

"...Ronning suggested that there might be an analogy between NLF participation in a conference and that of the Pathet Lao in the Laos conference.

"....

"Ronning said that he was convinced the DRV would continue to deny its military participation in South Vietnam but might accept something less clear-cut. He said the DRV did not want a branch of the CP in South Vietnam ever to declare its independence of North Vietnam. He suggested that bilateral U.S.-DRV talks without the GVN might offer some possibilities.



"Mr. Bundy said this was possible and we had offered this to the DRV during the pause. He noted that it might be necessary to arrive at some 'pre-digested' conclusion in such a forum. He observed, however, that the question of disclosure to the GVN presented a serious problem. Ronning stressed that the DRV could not sit at the conference table without the NLF since this would place all responsibility for military action in South Vietnam on itself.

"Mr. Bundy reiterated that the NLF was a really tough problem since it ran so close to the heart of the matter. It was possible to finesse other points, for example, accepting the four points implicitly by reiterating acceptance of the Geneva Accords, or simply deleting the objectionable clause in point three. Mr. Bundy said that the DRV still thought it could win the whole game but that ultimately, if it was convinced that there was no military victory possible, it might re-frame its political requirements and move for a political solution. He noted that we could without particular difficulty "de-fuse" point 13 of our 14 points by omitting the reference in that point to "aggression." Mr. Bundy also noted that the DRV was concerned about the timing of U.S. withdrawal.

January 27, 1966

STATE to AmEmbassy OTTAWA 826 (SECRET-EXDIS), 27 Jan 1966:

"For Ambassador from Bundy

"1. Canadian Ambassador Ritchie and former Canadian High Commissioner in New Delhi Ronning called on Bundy today and discussed planned visit by Amb. Ronning to Peking and Hanoi in near future. Ronning visit to be unofficial but he will travel with personal rank of Ambassador and at request of Foreign Minister Martin. Ronning has long-standing invitation from Chicom Fonmin Chen Yi to visit CPR extended when Ronning was Canadian Rep at 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos. Purpose of visit to sound out Peking and Hanoi on possible conference on Vietnam. Ronning said he without any illusions as to likelihood of success but thought visit in any event might be worthwhile.

....."

RUSK (Drafted by P. H. Kreisberg)



23, 1966

AmEmbassy OTTAWA 830 (SECRET-EXDIS), 28 Jan 1966

"1. ...we certainly have no objection to proposed Ronning trip....

"2. It occurs to us that Ronning trip may well have ulterior motives in terms of Canadian feelers on Chicom representation in UN or even Canadian recognition...."

RUSK (Drafted by W. P. Bundy)

AmEmbassy OTTAWA to SECSTATE 974 (SECRET-EXDIS), 28 Jan 1966

"For Bundy from Butterworth

"....

"3. Ever since he became Minister for External Affairs two and a half years ago Martin has had the idea of using Chester Ronning, who was born in China and went to school with Chou En-lai, to help bring about recognition of the Chinese Communists by the UN or by Canada or both.

"....

"5. Ronning is well-known in Canada as a Sinologist and has been more often than not critical of American Far Eastern policies....

....."

BUTTERWORTH

January 31, 1966

AmEmbassy OTTAWA to SECSTATE 981 (SECRET-EXDIS), 31 Jan 1966

"....

"2. ...Pearson confirmed Ronning mission was Martin's idea, that it entailed greater dangers than Martin had perhaps appreciated and that he had 'scared the hell out of Paul about it last night'...if anything went wrong, his government would disavow any involvement in the Ronning mission...."

BUTTERWORTH



AmEmbassy OTTAWA to SECSTATE 979 (SECRET-EXDIS), 31 Jan 1966

"....

"5. ...Martin volunteered that he had clearly in mind the domestic political scene and 'Diefenbaker's insincere support of the U.S. position in Vietnam' and that at some point he should demonstrate to the Canadian people that Canada had not just been a U.S. satellite but had done what it could to bring about a solution...."

BUTTERWORTH

February 2, 1966

AmEmbassy OTTAWA to SECSTATE 996 (SECRET-EXDIS), 2 Feb 1966

"For Assistant Secretary Bundy

"...Incredible though it may seem EXTAPP official stated Ronning's passport reads 'Special Emissary of Canadian Government with Personal Rank of Ambassador.' Ploy with Hanoi for obtaining visa is that Ronning interested in discussing Ho Chi Minh letter of January 24 to Prime Minister Pearson. Text of letter (copy being sent Dept. separately) parallels that sent other capitals except for last two sentences as follows: 'Your Excellency, Canada is a member of the International Commission for Supervision and Control for the Implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Vietnam. In face of the extremely serious situation brought about by the U.S.A. in Vietnam, I hope that your Government will fulfill its obligation under the Geneva agreements.

....."

BUTTERWORTH

February 4, 1966

STATE to AmConsul HONG KONG 1000, AmEmbassy SAIGON 2254, AmEmbassy OTTAWA 856

".....

"2. Ronning is retired diplomat, born in China and steeped in Sinology. He was most recently Canadian



High Commissioner in New Delhi and during that time represented Canada at Geneva Conference on Laos. We have long been exposed to his viewpoint, which tends personally to be highly critical of U.S. policy toward Communist China, and particularly to the advocacy of Chinese Communist admission to UN. Moreover, he apparently has long-standing personal ties with both Chou En-lai and Chen Yi, plus fact that his parents are buried in China, so that present visit has some handle in an earlier Chen Yi invitation and in the idea of visiting the graves of his parents.

"3. ...Despite our private misgivings as to his personal views, we have naturally had to say we would have no objection to such visit and indeed could only welcome any constructive initiative....

....."

RUSK (Drafted by W. P. Bundy)

STATE to AmEmbassy OTTAWA 857 (SECRET-EXDIS), 4 Feb 1966

"You should deliver following personal letter to Foreign Minister concerning Ronning visit:

"Dear Paul:

".....

"I must, however, express a shade of concern at the information that we have just had from Walton Butterworth that Ronning's passport will apparently carry the appearance of a formal accreditation as your special emissary with the personal rank of Ambassador....

"I am also more seriously concerned at the possibility that Ronning may find himself engaged in discussion, especially in Peiping, of the problems relating to Chinese representation at the UN and even, if I understand your last conversation with Walton Butterworth correctly, questions of recognition....

".....

"...I think we shall both have a great deal of thinking to do on this subject in the months ahead and I hope that in the first instance we can do it



on a very confidential basis between ourselves. I have therefore welcomed the indication that you are not discussing the Ronning trip with any other government, and I would end by repeating my hope and assumption that he will be listening only as to any matters other than Vietnam, and that in any event we shall have a full opportunity to talk over with you whatever he picks up in any area.

"With warm regards, Sincerely, Dean Rusk"

(Drafted by W. P. Bundy)

February 7, 1966

AmConsul HONG KONG to SECSTATE 1452 (SECRET-EXDIS), 7 Feb 1966

"We shall do what we can helpfully to influence Ronning's thinking if opportunity presents itself. Incidentally American in Hong Kong who will have fullest opportunity affect his thinking is NY Times correspondent Topping, who is his son-in-law."

RICE

February 24, 1966

STATE to AmEmbassy SAIGON 2512, AmConsul HONG KONG 1086; Info: AmEmbassy OTTAWA 943, AmEmbassy MANILA 1556 (SECRET-EXDIS), 24 Feb 1966

"1. Canadian Embassy has informed Dept. Ronning trip to Peking turned down by Chicoms but accepted by Hanoi. Ronning now in Hong Kong and scheduled go Saigon March 1 leaving for Hanoi March 7 and returning Saigon March 11....

".....

"3. ...Peking turndown of visit made through Chen Yi message to Ronning referring to U.S. actions in Vietnam and GOC support for these which make visit 'inopportune.' Door held open for some future visit, however.

"....."

RUSK (Drafted by P. H. Kreisberg)



MEMORANDUM to The Secretary from Samuel D. Berger, FE, Subj:  
Chester Ronning Visit to Peking and Hanoi, dated 24 Feb 1966  
(NODIS)

".....

"5. ...Hanoi's willingness and even enthusiasm in agreeing to Ronning's visit results in part from a growing feeling of isolation and in part from a desire to project a more 'positive' foreign policy image. The agreement by the DRV Charge in Moscow to obtain clarification for Lord Chalfont on some points in the DRV position and Hanoi's reversal of its decision last summer not to extend an invitation to Nkrumah to come to North Vietnam may be other aspects of this somewhat looser and more flexible foreign policy. Such a policy, designed to offer a more attractive image of Hanoi to the world at large, was specifically urged by DRV Politburo member Le Duc Tho earlier this month. The change in policy, however, is one of form, not content thus far.

....."

February 25, 1966

AmEmbassy SAIGON to RUEHC/SECSTATE 3100 (SECRET-EXDIS),  
25 Feb 1966

"1. It is true that I know that Mr. Ronning is taking the trip, but it is quite an exaggeration to say that I am 'fully informed of the background of his trip.' I honestly do not feel that I am aware of all the ins and outs and all the implications.

"2. Having in mind the British/North Vietnamese contact in Moscow, I would appreciate knowing of whatever understanding there may be in Washington.

"3. Once again we seem to be getting into direct contacts which affect the future of Vietnam and I do not know what to tell the Vietnamese."

LODGE

STATE to AmEmbassy SAIGON 2525 (SECRET-NODIS), 25 Feb 1966

"Eyes Only for the Ambassador from the Secretary

"Following are my own personal comments about the Ronning visit to Hanoi:"



"Quite frankly, the Canadians themselves seem to be of divided minds about his trip. Ronning has not been helpful on Vietnam and I have no doubt strongly favors recognition of Peiping. Mike Pearson is definitely skeptical about the whole affair but was inclined to go along with Paul Martin's guarded approval for the trip.

"I personally talked to Paul Martin about Ronning and emphasized that it was extremely important that Ronning do nothing to encourage a Hanoi miscalculation about our determination and do nothing to encourage a Hanoi miscalculation about our determination and do nothing to undermine the publicly stated positions of the United States. Martin assured me that he would make that very clear to Ronning.

"Actually, the Ronning trip was originally designed primarily for Peiping and I suspect that the question of recognition and Peiping membership in the UN was most on Ronning's mind. However, Peiping refused to let him come since Canada's attitude toward Vietnam made his visit QTE inopportune UNQTE.

"I can assure you there is no occult understanding between Washington and Ottawa on this matter. If you need to say anything to the South Vietnamese about the Ronning trip, you can tell them that he is on no mission for us, that he has been strongly advised not to say anything or do anything which would encourage Hanoi to believe that their effort will succeed and that his visit should be considered along with such efforts as have been made by many individuals to have a go at Hanoi. Quite frankly, I attach no importance to his trip and expect nothing out of it. At the same time it would be unwise to say anything to GVN which would appear to conflict with Canadian version of trip already given GVN and reported in Deptel 2512, Para 2."

RUSK (Drafted by Rusk)

March 3, 1966

Embassy OTTAWA to SECSTATE 1143 (CONF-NXDIS), 3 Mar 1966

"...Exstaff has put its ICC peace probe on ice, ... it is shifting concentration of its peace efforts to Ronning visit to Hanoi next week. ...Ronning is not mediator but explorer."

SCOTT



AmEmbassy SAIGON to SECSTATE 3178 (SECRET-EXDIS), 3 Mar 1966

"1. Moore (Canadian member ICC) called to present Ambassador Ronning who is on his way to Hanoi.

".....

"3. ...Ronning wished to find out if there was something useful that the ICC could do other than to implement the Geneva accords which have now been so thoroughly violated.

"4. He explained all this to Colonel An, the GVN liaison officer with the ICC, and was planning to tell Tran Van Do about it. An apparently did not object.

"5. ...Moore, who had gone to Hanoi to pave the way for Ronning, said that Hanoi's acceptance of the idea of Ronning's visit was 'immediate.' ...he seemed to think they were worried about the immense casualties which their Army was encountering and would be encountering in South Vietnam.

*we interpret it as weak*

"....."

LODGE

March 15, 1966

AmConGen HONG KONG to SECSTATE 1669 (SECRET-EXDIS), 15 Mar 1966

".....

"2. Results of mission: Ronning characterized results of his mission by quoting old Chinese saying; he had 'travelled ten thousand miles to present a feather.' He said he is more pessimistic about long-range Vietnamese problem than before his trip.

"3. NVN confidence: North Vietnamese leaders he spoke to from Nam Van Dong on down convinced they were winning war, although they concede it will be long struggle. In response my query how NVN expected achieve victory (e.g., by military victory, U.S. loss of determination, GVN collapse), Ronning said NVN views not clear. NVN leaders told him they fully expected step-up U.S. military effort, both in South and in bombing of North, including bombing of Hanoi, industries, etc. Explained they had few large industries; small industries being dispersed and plans made for evacuating government offices and populace.



Ronning commented to me that he did not disabuse NVN leaders of their estimates of increased U.S. military action. Instead, he tried to impress upon them that U.S. could bring vastly greater military power to bear than could the French in 1950's, and that therefore no chance of history repeating itself (as they seemed to believe).

\* "4. Negotiations: NVN leaders were totally unwilling budge from 'four points.' His remonstrances that strict adherence 'four points' would amount to total American surrender and were therefore unworkable as negotiations formula were greeted with attitude 'that's the American's problem.' Soviet Ambassador, while expressing full support NVN, implied there was somewhat greater possibility for negotiations by telling him that first prerequisite was permanent cessation of bombing of NVN. When Ronning asked why, if this was the case, NVN had made no response during recent bombing pause, Soviet Ambassador said 'they did respond' but refused specify channel or content. Ambassador said resumption of bombing came at just the wrong time and gave Ronning impression resumption had 'roused up' overtures Soviets were making to Hanoi at the time.

"5. Sino-Soviet dispute: NVN leaders attempted downplay importance of dispute and particularly its impact on Vietnam situation. Told him they expected Chicom to attend CPSU Congress, but claimed they did not know composition delegation.

NTE "6. Geneva Accords. Ronning said both GVN and NVN leaders talked of return to Geneva Accords but in completely different terms. GVN leaders stressed provisions for withdrawal of NVN and VC forces, and claimed that reunification would eventually come through 'disintegration' of communist control in north. NVN leaders stressed elections and claimed they were confident election results would pave way to early reunification.

"7. Ronning's treatment: Ronning found that as a Canadian he treated better than British who support American position fully, but made politely aware that Canada little more than American satellite. However Pham Van Dong appreciative of Pearson's public statement of regret over resumption of bombing in north. Ronning found his several hours of talks with Hanoi leaders very wearing and frustrating with conversations



wandering down blind alleys and always returning to same intransigent dead end. He got impression he was object of team effort at wearing him down, as long, hard hours of conversation with one group of officials would soon be followed, with little rest, by another session with fresh team. Some talks also scheduled in early morning with scarcely fifteen minutes notice, apparently to keep him off balance. He was in constant company of protocol cadre (with whom he could converse in Chinese) and interpreter.

"8. Impressions of Hanoi: People adequately clothed and fed. Ronning made special point of visiting market and found rice, fish, meat and vegetables in seemingly good supply. Only stall with line of people in front was selling flour. (He could not tell whether it was Canadian or not, but noticed word 'flour' in English on bag.) Streets were practically empty at night, and Ronning was told that many oldsters, youth, and cadre dependents had been evacuated.

"9. Ho Chi Minh out of sight: Ho, an old acquaintance of Ronning's sent apologies explaining that round of meetings in connection with forthcoming Soviet Congress left no time to see him. It rumoured in Hanoi that Ho planning attend Congress.

"10. Chinese also not in evidence: with exception of banquet room full of Chinese cultural troupers in Sun Yat Sen suits, Ronning saw no Chinese in Hanoi. Chicom Embassy personnel invited to reception given by North Vietnamese his honor did not show up.

....."

ARMSTRONG

March 20, 1966

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION; Subject: Ronning Visit: Hanoi; Participants: Canadian Ambassador Chester Ronning, Canadian Ambassador Charles S. A. Ritchie, Embassy of Canada, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy, Mr. Michael Shenstone, Counselor, Embassy of Canada, Mr. Paul H. Kreisberg, OIC, Mainland China Affairs, ACA.

"1. Ambassador Ronning passed the attached memorandum to Mr. Bundy, which summarizes his principal meetings in Hanoi.

ATTACHMENT QUOTE

Accompanied by Mr. V. C. Moore, Canadian



Commissioner, I.C.S.C., Mr. Chester Ronning visited Hanoi from March 7 to 11, as a Special Representative of the Canadian Government.

Mr. Ronning's instructions were to present Prime Minister Pearson's reply to Ho Chi Minh's letter of January 24, and to discuss with the North Vietnamese authorities the conditions in which they would envisage a negotiated settlement in Vietnam, including the possibility of the International Commission playing a helpful good offices role in bringing about or facilitating such negotiations. His primary objective was to obtain, if possible, authoritative clarification of the conditions enunciated by the Hanoi Government as required elements in a negotiated settlement.

Ronning was received by, and had discussions with, Vice Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, Col. Ha Van Lau, Chief of the PAVN Mission in charge of liaison with the I.C.S.C., and, on the last day of the visit, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. This final interview lasted for two hours.

All the discussions were marked, on the North Vietnamese side, by repeated emphasis on the necessary acceptance of the 'Four Points' as the only basis on which a peaceful settlement could be approached, and by an apparent uncompromising belief in the ultimate 'victory' of their cause.

The early part of the interview with Pham Van Dong revealed these same obdurate attitudes, and seemed to suggest that there would be no deviation by the Prime Minister from the determined, confident, hard-line approach registered by the others in previous discussions. Towards the end of the interview, however, and under persistent questioning by Ronning about the conditions Hanoi would require to have met before entering into direct or indirect talks with the U.S.A., the Prime Minister gave the following indication: North Vietnamese willingness to enter into some form of preliminary contact hinges on a commitment by the U.S.A. to cease 'bombing and all acts of war against North Vietnam' 'unconditionally and for good'.

In reply to questioning he made it clear that this condition was limited to North Vietnamese territory and did not encompass U.S. military activity in the South.

It was not clear whether the commitment envisaged by Pham Van Dong was to be given publicly, or diplomatically.



(The translator used the term 'declaration'.) Furthermore, while Pham Van Dong conveyed the impression that Hanoi's response to such a move by the U.S.A. would lead to negotiating contacts, he gave no clarification of whether he envisaged these as being direct or indirect. He said: 'In fact, our position includes many aspects. In brief, we can say that informal talks and a cessation of attacks against North Vietnam go together.'

He did intimate, however, that he was soliciting a U.S. response, and a further exchange with the U.S.A. through Canadian channels. 'For our part', Pham Van Dong said, 'we will look into the attitude of the U.S.A., and with all understanding.'

It was agreed that what had been said to Ronning would be conveyed to the U.S.A., as a Canadian understanding of the North Vietnamese position, and not on the basis of a request by North Vietnam to do so. It was also understood that Canada was not volunteering to act as a mediator.

Emphasis was laid on the importance of absolute secrecy in any exchange that might develop from Ronning's discussions. Earlier feelers had become public and the North Vietnamese had been forced to issue a denial.  
ATTACHMENT END QUOTE

"2. He noted that in contrast to Saigon where he had operated completely under the ICC cloak, Hanoi was anxious that his visit there not be under ICC auspices. On his arrival he was escorted into the city separately from Victor Moore, the Canadian ICC representative in Hanoi.

"3. Ronning found the Vice Foreign Minister, the Foreign Minister and ICC Liaison Officer, Col. Han Van Lao all equally hard and uncompromising on negotiations. All insisted on the US acceptance of the '4 points', the role of the NLF as 'sole representative of the people of South Vietnam', etc. Col. Han Van Lao said that the DRV wanted the ICC to continue but emphasized it was important that it make the proper findings. No findings at all were preferable to bad ones.

"4. Ronning said he tried in all his conversations to argue that it was a mistake to believe the Americans were like the French and could be driven out by military means. He said that all the Vietnamese took a 'black and white' view: the Americans were wrong and the DRV was 'right'. The Foreign Minister and other subordinate officials said they expected the US to destroy Hanoi and Haiphong. They were



evacuating women, children, dispersing Government offices and factories, and were prepared to fight to the end. The United States, they said, could never crush an agricultural society like that of North Vietnam.

"5. Officials below the Prime Minister also were critical of Canada for being an American 'satellite'.

"6. Ronning's last substantive conversation was with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. Until nearly the end of his conversation, he was as rigid as his subordinates. In response to a question from Ronning inquiring whether there was nothing which could be done, Pham Van Dong said that the DRV would be prepared to have talks with the United States if the latter declared an unconditional and permanent halt to its bombings of North Vietnam. In response to a request for clarification, Pham Van Dong said he was not referring to military action in the South, only in the North. He added at this point, however, that this had already been included in the January 4, 1966 Foreign Ministry Statement and was not new. He agreed in response to Ronning's request to provide Ronning with an aide memoire on talks following a permanent halt in bombings. Subsequently Ronning was told by an aide to Pham Van Dong that there had been a misunderstanding and no aide-memoire would be forthcoming. Ronning said that at no point had an acceptance of the '4 points' been linked to the halt in bombing by Pham Van Dong. Dong asked that the Government of Canada convey this message to the United States and said several times that the DRV wanted to keep a channel open through the Canadians.

"7. Ronning said he had asked Dong why the DRV hadn't talked to the United States during the last 'pause'. Dong said they had (the Soviet Ambassador made this same point). Pham Van Dong had also tossed off the Sino-Soviet conflict as merely a 'difference of opinion' and had emphasized both were friends of the DRV and would help defend the security of a socialist country.

"8. Pham Van Dong concluded by observing that the Canadians were 'men of good will' and while 'good will' doesn't matter much, one should use it when one can.

"9. Dong accepted Prime Minister Pearson's letter to Ho Chi Minh but expressed regret that Ho was too busy to see Ronning. Dong said the Chinese Communists would go to Moscow for the 23rd CPSU Congress and that Chou En-lai would probably lead the delegation. (Ambassador Ritchie said Ambassador Dobrynin had told him Chou would not be going to Moscow.)



"10. Ronning expressed his personal opinion that the offer of talks for a complete halt to bombing was separate from the '4 points' but added that, on balance, he frankly did not himself think anything significant had emerged from his visit.

"11. Mr. Bundy observed that the Hanoi ploy was clever; since the bombing question had in the past (including Ho Chi Minh's January 24 letter) been linked publicly with the '4 points', acceptance of the DRV offer implied acceptance of the '4 points.' He said Pham Van Dong's remarks would, however, call for some careful consideration. To Mr. Bundy's question as to whether Pham Van Dong had discussed the role of the NLF in negotiations, Ronning said he had not and suggested Hanoi wanted to avoid discussing matters that pertained directly to the South."

March 31, 1966

Memorandum (SECRET/EXDIS); To: FE - Mr. Bundy; From: ACA - Harold W. Jacobson; Subject: EXDIS Response to Pham Van Dong's Remarks to Ronning.

... .

"2. According to Ronning's account, the only concrete proposal made to him in Hanoi was Pham Van Dong's last minute suggestion that DRV willingness to enter preliminary talks with us 'hinges' on the question of our declaration of an unconditional and permanent halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. We could hardly respond positively on this; we could, at best, only seek further information. Therefore, instead of responding directly to the Ronning message, Paul suggested, and David Dean and I concur, that the EXDIS Aide Memoire sent to the DRV through Rangoon, February 16, be resubmitted to the DRV through the Canadians in the course of their routine travels to Hanoi. At the same time we could request the Canadians to add the following oral comment: 'A representative of the US would be prepared to discuss the question of talks leading toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Vietnam at any time. The proposal by the North Vietnamese Premier that the US permanently and completely halt such bombings could, of course, be among the subjects for discussion in such a meeting.'"



April 22, 1966

Department of State Memorandum for the File.

"Mr. Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, called at 9:05 AM from Ottawa, to speak to Mr. William Bundy.

.....  
 "..... His main concern was the long interval - the Canadians had had some word from 'Asia' to the effect that they too are concerned about the length of time [since the last visit.] Mr. Martin said he felt very strongly indeed that they had to go back with something - even nothing - even something contrived.

"Mr. Bundy said that any response would not be contrived on our side; that he had reviewed a proposed message to the Canadian Government just yesterday and had mentioned previously to Ambassador Ritchie that we did not feel that it would be a propitious thing to move 'while things are at white heat.'

"Mr. Martin replied that he appreciated that, but felt that what we had to do was establish with 'these people' the notion - quite genuine on the Canadian side - that we want to do something and that we are really trying. He stated that the potentiality of this matter cannot be minimized.

.....  
 "Mr. Bundy said we would couch our memorandum in such terms that it would be up to the Canadians just how our message would be conveyed."

.....  
 (Drafted by B. M. Moore)

Department of State Memorandum for the Secretary (through S/S);  
 Subject: Pending Vietnam Matters, dated 22 April 1966.

.....  
 "..... Paul Martin is very anxious for a prompt response on the Ronning approach. We still do not see much in it but plainly our relations with Paul Martin alone would dictate as forthcoming a response as we can make. I have drafted a reply. ...."

.....  
 William P. Bundy



April 26, 1966

MEMORANDUM TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

"1. The Department of State has carefully studied the memorandum provided by Ambassador Chester Ronning following his trip to Hanoi on March 7-11, and has further considered Ambassador Ronning's personal report to Mr. Bundy on his visit on March 20. . . .

"2. We agree that the Canadian channel to Hanoi that this approach has provided should be kept open, and have refrained from proposing a reply up to this point because of the political crisis in Saigon. To have approached Hanoi in these circumstances seemed to us unwise.

"3. As the Canadian Government is aware, a direct channel between the United States Government and Hanoi was opened in Rangoon during the period of the recent bombing suspension. . . . the record stands that a direct channel has been opened, but that Hanoi chooses for the time being not to employ it.

"4. Against this background, and in the light of repeated North Vietnamese statements insisting upon the acceptance of the so-called 'Four Points' before any discussions or negotiations--and insisting that the US demonstrate such acceptance by 'concrete acts' such as the unequivocal and permanent cessation of bombing of the North--the USG is unable to evaluate the message conveyed to Mr. Ronning as indicating any real 'give' in Hanoi's position. We understand that Prime Minister Pham Van Dong reiterated the DRV's 'four points,' but at the close of the conversation suggested or hinted that Hanoi might be prepared to enter into discussions if the US would declare a permanent cessation of bombing attacks on the North. It seems most probable that this was still intended to be linked with acceptance of the 'four points,' although a contrary interpretation is conceivable. In any event, it should of course be clear that the U.S.G. could not accept a unilateral cessation of this form of military activity without some reciprocal action of the North Vietnamese side involving its infiltration of men and equipment into the South and perhaps also the overall level of military activity in the South.

"5. In the circumstances, the U.S.G. believes that a message should be conveyed to Hanoi--either through the regular Canadian ICC representatives, or, if desired, Ambassador Ronning--which would explore the meaning of the North Vietnamese suggestion as far as possible and reiterate US willingness to pursue the matter further through the established direct channel. The Canadian channel might continue to be used in the event of a



forthcoming response. In view of the complexity of the issues that would be involved in any true reciprocal reduction of hostilities, it would be the US hope, however, that if Hanoi were interested, the matter would be pursued directly as soon as possible. Specifically, the USG suggests that an oral message along the following lines be conveyed in Hanoi at the appropriate level:

TEXT

"A. The Canadian Government has conveyed to the USG the views expressed by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong to Ambassador Chester Ronning on March 11. The reaction of the USG indicated that it could not accept the apparent suggestion that the USG must agree to a permanent cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam as a unilateral and non-reciprocated pre-condition to the holding of discussions. The Canadian Government knows, from the public and private statements of US representatives, that the US is itself prepared for discussions or negotiations without any preconditions whatever, and that it would also be prepared to consider a reciprocal reduction in hostilities in Vietnam, which could include the question of the bombing of North Vietnam. However, action concerning the latter, as the Canadian Government understands the US view, could not be undertaken unilaterally in the absence of reciprocal measures by North Vietnam. The Canadian Government is confident the USG would be interested in any indication the DRV was interested in such reciprocal actions, and of what sort. Moreover, interest was expressed by the USG as to whether the remarks of Prime Minister Pham Van Dong indicated the possibility that mutual and reciprocal reductions in military activity might in themselves serve to create the possibility for holding of discussions or talks.

"B. The Canadian Government is assured that the USG would be prepared at any time to discuss directly and in fullest confidence the respective positions of the USG and the North Vietnamese Government and the possible means of reconciling these positions and moving toward a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict.

"C. The Canadian Government knows that the US would be interested in any response, or any indication of its position in any respect, that the Government of North Vietnam might wish to communicate to the Government of Canada."



April 26, 1966

Ambassy OTTAWA 1443 to SecState (SECRET/NODIS).

"1. I delivered the memorandum contained in reftel to Exstaff Min Martin. . . .

"3. Martin . . . said that he had been concerned that delay on our part might call into question Canada's 'credibility' and this was the reason why 'in the absence of Dean and you and Charles Ritchie' he had 'impulsively picked up the telephone' and called Bundy. He went on to say that the U.S. had been assured that nothing that was in our national interest to know would be withheld; nevertheless GOC did have important information of which it was the sole possessor. . . ."

BUTTERWORTH

April 30, 1966

Oral Message (Final Draft)

"A. The Canadian Government has conveyed to the United States Government the views expressed by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong to Ambassador Chester Ronning on March 11 . . . .

"B. The Canadian Government told the United States Government that, on the basis of the impressions gained by Ambassador Chester Ronning, the D.R.B.H. would be prepared to have informal talks if there were an unconditional undertaking by the United States to cease bombing and all acts of war against North Vietnam. The reaction of the United States Government indicated that it could not accept a suggestion in these terms, that is to say, that it must agree to a permanent cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam as a unilateral and non-reciprocated precondition to the holding of discussions.

"C. The Canadian Government knows, from the public and private statements of U.S. representatives, that the United States is itself prepared to engage in discussions or negotiations without preconditions. If this could not be done on the North Vietnamese side without preconditions involving the question of halting the bombing of North Vietnam, the Canadian Government understands that the United States would be prepared to proceed towards talks on the basis of a reciprocal reduction in hostilities in Vietnam of which a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam would be one element. The Canadian Government is confident that the United States Government would be interested



in any indication that the D.R.V.N. was prepared to consider such a reciprocal reduction in hostilities and, if so, of what sort. The Canadian Government also believes that the United States Government would be prepared to contemplate the possibility of a mutual and reciprocal reduction in military activity. This might in itself serve to create the possibility for the holding of discussions or talks.

"D. The Canadian Government knows that the United States would be interested in any response, or any indication of its position in any respect, that the Government of North Vietnam might wish to communicate to the Government of Canada.

"E. The United States Government are interested in seeing the Canadian channel kept open. The Canadian Government is also assured that the United States Government would be prepared at any time to discuss directly and in fullest confidence the respective positions of the United States Government and the North Vietnamese Government and the possible means of reconciling these positions and moving toward a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict."

May 2, 1966

MEMORANDUM (SECRET/NODIS); To: Mr. Bundy; From: Paul H. Kreisberg;  
Subject: Ronning II

"The draft Canadian oral message based upon our April 26th memorandum to the GOC seems to me to be essentially satisfactory and to accurately reflect the spirit of our original memorandum. . . ."

. . . . .

May 5, 1966

Note to the Secretary (SECRET/NODIS)

"Ambassador Waller (Australia) came to see me this afternoon and asked point blank about what Chester Ronning was up to. In the circumstances, I decided that the only thing to do was to tell him frankly the situation. I therefore said that, Ronning had been up in Hanoi in March and had talked to Pham Van Dong, who had reiterated the four points but then had thrown out a tempting suggestion that they might be prepared to talk if we agreed to stop the bombing. I said that we had sat on this message during the recent political troubles, but were now prepared to authorize the Canadians (I did not specify whether it would be Ronning himself) to go back and say that we were interested in whether Hanoi had really meant to say that it no longer insisted on the four points and was talking only of a



cessation of bombing, and secondly that if this was the suggestion we could not accept it on a unilateral basis but would have to know what Hanoi proposed to do itself. . . ."

William P. Bundy

May 9, 1966

Department of State, Note to the Secretary (SECRET/NODIS)

"Walt Rostow heard from the Ranch today that the President has indicated that if you wish we may give Ottawa approval of the attached revised Ronning oral message to Hanoi without checking back with him, but the President asked whether we might not have to override this political initiative with a more far-reaching one if we take the air action against NVN now being pressed by DOD.

"Under these circumstances, do you wish the revised draft to be given to the Canadians at this time?"

Benjamin H. Read

May 15, 1966

STATE 1219 to Anembassy OTTAWA (SECRET/NODIS)

"5. We would prefer that Ronning . . . make the following points:

(a) He understands that the ICRC in accordance with its traditional neutrality and independence stands ready to make its services available to prisoners on both sides of this conflict. . . .

(c) He has reason to believe that the U.S. would be prepared to discuss arrangements for a possible release or exchange of these prisoners, either through the Red Cross, or through another intermediary, or directly. North Vietnamese receptivity to such a move would be an important step toward lessening of tension.

"6. We would not want Ronning to raise the issue of 'war



crimes trials', partly because there are recent indications that Hanoi does not intend to go through with its threat to try these men. . . ."

RUSK (Drafted by F. A. Sieverts)

May 24, 1966

SAIGON TT External 42 Immed DE DELHI

"Following is text of Hanoi Tel CH141 May 21: Begins: For Commissioner only from Donahue QUOTE Was requested to attend mtg with Van Lau today at 1830 hours. After brief exchange of pleasantries he got right down to business. He gave us well rehearsed summary of the Vietnam situation, reaffirming time and again that the USA and her satellites were cause of the present situation. He stated that in spite of world opinion condemning her policy, the USA was intensifying and expanding the war.

"2. QUOTE At the end of this talk he said he did not rpt not have a let to give me but he did give me an Aide Memoire which laid out the point of view of his Govt. I am enclosing full text of this note. He requested that I bring the point of view of his Govt. to your attn as well as their views on the proposals made by our PM on May 2. He emphasized this last point.

"3. QUOTE Following is full text of note QUOTE Par A1 - Everybody knows that the deep root and the immed cause of the present serious situation in Vietnam lie in the USA policy of intervention and aggression. At present, the USA Govt. keep sending more USA and satellite troops to South Vietnam in an attempt to intensify and expand its war of aggression there, at the same time frenziedly QUOTE escalating UNQUOTE its air war against the DRVN evilly committing countless crimes against the Vietnamese people. So far it has refused to recognize the four-point stand of the Govt. of the DRVN and to recognize the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation as the sole genuine rep of the people of South Vietnam. It is obvious that the USA policy of aggression vis-a-vis Vietnam remains unchanged. 2. The Govt. of the DRVN once again affirms that if the USA Govt. really desires a peaceful settlement it must recognize the four-point stand of the DRVN Govt., prove this by actual deeds; it must announce a definitive and unconditional end to its air raids and all other actions of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Only then will it be possible to envisage



a political solution to the Vietnam problem. 3. According to recent reports from Western news agencies, on May, 1966 the CDN PM came out with a proposal or measure for a settlement of the Vietnam problem. It is to be regretted that this proposal conforms neither to the fundamental provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, nor to the actual situation in Vietnam. It makes no rpt no distinction between the USA which is the aggressor and the Vietnamese people who are the victims of aggression fighting in self-defence. It does not rpt not meet the four-point stand of the DRVN Govt. However, out of good will, we consider that Mr. Ronning's visit to Hanoi may be agreed to as proposal by the CDN Govt. The timing of the visit will be intimated in due course. Hanoi May 21/66  
UNQUOTE.

MOORE

June 3, 1966

OTTAWA 1635 to SecState (SECRET/NODIS)

"1. GOC learned today that Ronning mission acceptable to Hanoi in mid-June, so Ronning expected fly to Hanoi from Saigon on ICC aircraft June 14 and return June 18.

"3. Extaff has queried whether Dept. has any comment for it on that section of John Finney article in NY Times of June 3 which stated that USG QUOTE has sent a new message to Hanoi pledging willingness to cease bombing if NVN, under some form of international verification, stops infiltrating troops into SVN. These diplomatic overtures have been conveyed to Peking and Hanoi in recent days through diplomatic channels and through private, informal meetings by individuals who were understood to know administration thinking. END QUOTE."

BUTTERNORTH

June 6, 1966

OTTAWA 5312 to SecState (SECRET/NODIS)

"1. It would be less disturbing if Canadians were to leave informing GVN about Ronning mission to US. However we recognize this might not satisfy Canadians, and that may be behind their offer to clear their approach in advance. . . .



"3. We, of course, will . . . . use argument that Canadians wished to pursue matter, we had no wish to discourage them, and while we do not expect results we will keep GVN informed."

LODGE

June 8, 1966

BRUSSELS SECTO 87 to SecState (TOP SECRET/NODIS); Eyes Only for Secretary McNamara from Secretary Rusk.

"Reference your telegram on Ronning, you may have seen by telegram to the President. I am deeply disturbed by general international revulsion, and perhaps a great deal at home, if it becomes known that we took an action which sabotaged the Ronning mission to which we had given our agreement. I recognize agony of this problem for all concerned. We could make arrangements to get an immediate report from Ronning. If he has a negative report, as we expect, that provides a firmer base for the action we contemplate and would make a difference to people like Wilson and Pearson. If, on the other hand, he learns that there is any serious breakthrough toward peace, the President would surely want to know of that before an action which would knock such a possibility off the tracks. I strongly recommend therefore against ninth or tenth. I regret this because of my maximum desire to support you and your colleagues in your tough job."

RUSK

June 8, 1966

SAIGON 5379 to SecState (SECRET/NODIS)

Section one of two.

.....

"2. Moore then launched into a long talk full of miscellaneous items about what he has picked up in North Viet-Nam, as follows:

"3. The North Vietnamese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs had told Moore that the Ia Pira peace feeler had been genuine, but the Hanoi regime had had to denounce it when the leak came.

"4. Moore was very emphatic on the danger of leaks, and, in fact, on the whole danger of talking a great deal and having a lot



of publicity about peace feelers. He said that Hanoi have 'played ball' as regards keeping quiet on the first Ronning trip, and he believed they would do so this time.

"5. In particular, he deplores a U.S. statement which he said was made by McCloskey on June 3, which gave in public almost exactly what the substance was of what the Canadians were planning to say in private. . . .

LODGE

Section two of two.

"12. . . . On the matter of a public statement explaining the reason for the Ronning trip, he said it was clear that Hanoi did not like any talk about 'a new role for the Commission' and that would not be used as an explanation.

"13. Moore agrees with his Polish colleague that there is a 'will to talk' in Hanoi and cited the receptiveness to the suggestion that Ronning could come as an illustration.

"14. He talked a good deal about conversations which he had had with Ma Van Lau, the Hanoi regime's liaison man with the ICC, and honorary colonel and a professional French-trained civil servant. Lau said: 'The U.S. must show its sincerity by its deeds.' At a number of dinners and lunches, where he constantly ran into Lau, the conversation always was on Lau's part and the other guests around him: 'How can this war be ended?' Lau often discussed reunification, with discussions running something like this: 'After the fighting stops, there should be a fairly long interval, during which the status quo continues with the two countries divided at the 17th parallel, depending on the circumstances. After that, it would be possible to see whether there were some changed ideas in Saigon and Hanoi.' But, Moore said, implicit in everything that Lau said was that the NLF was the only legitimate group and would, of course, have to be the government of South Viet-Nam."

LODGE



June 15, 1966

STATE 3563 to Amembassy TOKYO (TOP SECRET/NODIS); Literally Eyes  
Only for Ambassador from Secretary

"1. As you know from discussion at Baguio meeting, we have had under continuing consideration the possibility of bombing key POL installations in DRV, notably Hanoi and Hanoi installations, which are just outside city limits and in areas where we believe civilian casualties can be kept to extremely low figures under the prescribed operating rules of good weather and daylight operations. Operation would involve total of roughly seven targets and could be conducted in two good weather days, although the likelihood of good weather and effective attack may be such as to cause it to stretch for four days or more.

"... Assuming that the operation were to be conducted between now and early July, we request your personal assessment as to the level of Japanese reaction to be anticipated and the attitude GOJ might take. ....

RUSK (Drafted by W. P. Bundy)

STATE to Amembassy VIENTIANE 802; Info: Amembassy OTTAWA 13/11 and Amembassy SAIGON 3911 (SECRET/NODIS)

"2. .... your arrangement with Maclellan to see him June 18 is exactly right. You should find occasion to re-confirm this meeting and to make absolutely sure you see Rounting soonest as he returns."

RUSK (Drafted by W. P. Bundy)

Department of State Memorandum of Conversation (SECRET); Subject: Working Visit; Participants: Mr. Michael Shenstone, Counselor, Canadian Embassy; Mr. Leonard Unger, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs.

"1. .... Moore recounted a conversation of Rounting (and himself, presumably) with a senior DRV Foreign Ministry



official who said that there will be no DRV press release on the Ronning visit this time and he hoped that the Canadians would likewise make no public statement. The official went on to say that his Government presumes that Peking knows about the Ronning visit but the DRV nevertheless wished to avoid the added affront that might be given by its being publicly announced. Moore speculated that an added factor might be that Ho Chi Minh might still be present in Peking. . . ."

June 15, 1966

LONDON, JUNE 15 (REUTERS)

"Prime Minister Harold Wilson hinted today that another peace initiative in Vietnam might be made soon.

"The Prime Minister said a mission to Hanoi last year by junior Minister Harold Davies was greatly harmed by premature publicity.

"I shall be careful to say nothing today," Wilson told a meeting of his parliamentary labor party. "This does not mean that there will be none."

"Diplomatic observers in London thought Wilson may have been referring to the mission of special Canadian Envoy Chester Ronnings.

"Officials in Ottawa today said Ronning was now in Hanoi on his second mission since March."

June 17, 1966

MEMO to Ambassador VIENTIANE 805; Info: Ambassador OTTAWA 1349 and Ambassador SAIGON 3943. Eyes Only for Charge.

"In your conversation with Ronning, if he should give negative reading, you should inquire particularly whether he is making immediate cable report to his government in this sense."

MMX (Drafted by W. P. Bundy)



June 17, 1966

OTTAWA 1710 to SecState (SECRET/NODIS)

....

"Martin said he had given Ronning instructions to be very careful, depending on what he comes out with, about what he tells our people in Vientiane. He is instructed in any case to send a full report as promptly as possible to Martin himself. ...."

....

SCOTT

June 18, 1966

SAIGON 5628 to SecState (SECRET/NODIS)

"Moore has more than clammed up. He regrets he is under strict instructions not rpt not to talk to us until he reports to Ottawa. .... His instructions provide that Ottawa will do the talking. ...."

LODGE

VIENTIANE 1335 to SecState; Info: Ottawa 98 and Saigon 654 (SECRET/NODIS)

"1. .... I was unable see Ronning during his brief stopover here this morning. Maclellan apparently received two days ago categorical instructions from Ottawa that Ronning was to see no one rpt no one on his return from Hanoi. ...."

....

SWANK

June 20, 1966

OTTAWA 1722 to SecState

....

"2. Martin said his primary reason for wanting to see



Kreisberg first was to emphasize his grave concern that any escalation in military action in Vietnam by U.S. in immediate future would jeopardize Canadian good faith with Hanoi and make it appear U.S. used Ronning as means of obtaining negative readout on negotiations which would justify escalation."

SCOTT

June 21, 1966

OTTAWA to SecState 1740 FLASH (SECRET/EXDIS); For Secretary from Bundy.

"2. Basically, Hanoi turned Ronning down cold on their paying any price whatever for the cessation of bombing. It is Ronning's impression that they understood his message to relate to preliminary talks of the character that we had had in Rangoon. In other words, Hanoi appeared to Ronning to be saying that they would not even talk to us in this fashion unless we agreed to cease bombing totally on their terms, without any reciprocal action on their part.

"3. Ronning thinks Hanoi had hoped he was bringing something more forthcoming than our familiar position calling for reduction of hostilities to be reciprocal. DRV Reps did refer specifically to our June 3 spokesman's statement on this subject, which of course had simply repeated the position we had stated many times, most specifically in our reply to the British last August. Martin this afternoon gave me no hint of recrimination because of our having repeated this position publicly, but this remains a potentially troublesome point that he may raise this evening.

"4. Having covered the question of conditions for preliminary talks, Ronning went on to have a general discussion of the conditions under which there might be QTE a cease-fire and negotiations UNQTE. The DRV foreign minister dealt very generally with this subject, but the total DRV comment appeared to add up to there being a satisfactory prior understanding, before QTE negotiations UNQTE, as to (1) our recognition of the status of the NLF (not spelled out); (2) return of (sic) the 1954 Agreements; (3) withdrawal of U.S. forces (not specified whether this must take place prior to negotiations or as to the



ultimate result); (4) the four points. Ronning did not get into detail on these questions, but the litany sounds familiar.

"5. The only conceivable sign of life in all the conversations is that the DRV Reps did say categorically that acceptance of the four points was not repeat not a necessary condition to preliminary talks. The only condition for such preliminary talks in our unilateral cessation of bombing. However, as I have noted above, this appears to relate only to resumption of Rangoon-type contact, and as to any substantive negotiations the four points are still in the picture. I conclude that the result is clearly negative and I hope to confirm more categorically tonight that Pearson and Martin accept this. I also expect to get into the question of what they will be saying in their Parliament. My own thought is that they might say that Ronning was seeking on Canadian initiative to see whether a basis could be established for talks among the interested parties. His conclusion was that no such basis as yet existed. This kind of formula would avoid Martin's saying what the positions were or whether he agreed with the American position, which I surmise he would be reluctant to do."

BUTTERWORTH

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION (SECRET/EXDIS); Subject: Visit of Ambassador Ronning to Hanoi, June 14-17, 1966; Participants: Canada: The Honorable Paul Martin, Minister of External Affairs; Ambassador Chester Ronning, Government of Canada; Mr. Ralph Collins, Under Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs; Mr. Claus Goldschlag, Director of Far Eastern Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs; Mr. Thomas Delworth, Vietnam Desk Officer, Ministry of External Affairs. United States: Mr. William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs; Minister Joseph W. Scott, American Embassy, Ottawa; Mr. Paul H. Kreisberg, OIC, Mainland China Affairs, FE/ACA.

"1. Ambassador Ronning said that he was met on his arrival in Hanoi by Le Thanh, Director of the North American Division of the DRV Foreign Ministry. He was greeted warmly and given the best suite in the Government's guest house in Hanoi, considerably better accommodations than he had had during his first visit in March. The evening of the same day, June 14, Le Thanh gave a small dinner party for Ambassador Ronning at which he subjected Ronning to a continuous hard line presentation of the DRV position throughout the evening. Ronning said that he had not paid much attention to Le Thanh's remarks in view of his relatively junior status.

"2. The next day, June 15, Ronning was received by Vice Foreign Minister Nguyen Go Thach. Ambassador Ronning conveyed



to Thach the oral message with which he had been provided by the US Government and requested that Thach pass it on to his superiors in the DRV Government. Thach agreed to do so but gave his personal opinion that it was doubtful a favorable response would be forthcoming. . . .

"3. Later in the afternoon of June 15, Ronning saw PAVN ICC liaison officer, Col. Ha Van Lao. Ha analyzed at great length the Vietnamese situation--both North and South--emphasizing that the North Vietnamese were prepared to resist indefinitely, that no matter how much the U.S. increased its efforts the North Vietnamese had the ability to deal with the situation, and that the US would inevitably be defeated in South Vietnam. He claimed the Viet Cong were winning everywhere and that recent South Vietnam political difficulties proved the US did not have the confidence of the people. He also said criticisms of US policy in the US, specifically referring to Senator Fulbright and Walter Lippmann, also proved that there was a lack of American confidence in President Johnson. He said, however, that the DRV was not counting on US opinion to win but on the strength of 'the Vietnamese people themselves.'

. . . .

"5. On the third day, June 16, Ambassador Ronning saw the highest official to whom he was given access on this trip, Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, who, however, received him in his concomitant capacity as Vice Premier. Trinh said that the US oral message had been considered and that the North Vietnamese had been disappointed that Ronning had brought a reply similar to newspaper reports with which the DRV was already familiar. He said there was nothing in the Ronning message that the DRV had not already considered and accused the Canadians of joining with the US in another 'peace offensive'. He said he had considered the Canadians to be sincere and to have had good will which was why they had accepted the offer of good offices by the Government of Canada. He rejected as impossible, however, any suggestion that the DRV pay a price for a halt of US bombing of North Vietnam. (Ronning's interpreter told him the next morning that part of the reason the US proposal had been rejected was that the DRV could not permit the US to believe it was so concerned about US bombing that it would pay a price for its halt.) He furthermore charged that the US had been escalating the war since Ronning's last visit in March and asked how it was possible for Ronning to be in Vietnam 'negotiating' while this was going on. Ronning denied that he was engaging in 'negotiations' but was simply trying to discover whether there were any mutually acceptable bases on which to move toward a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict might be made. Ronning asked Trinh whether his remarks meant that the March DRV proposal was now being withdrawn. Trinh said



it was not and that if the US was willing to accept the original DRV proposal, the DRV was prepared to 'talk'. Ronning further asked whether, if the DRV concluded that the CCC was insincere and that it lacked confidence in Canadian good will and efforts to contribute to an honorable settlement, there was any point in continuing the discussions further and in keeping the 'Canadian' channel open. Trinh again expressed regret that Ronning's presentation to Vice Foreign Minister Thach had showed 'lack of appreciation' of the DRV position but added that it was the US attitude to which the DRV objected primarily and that the North Vietnamese wished to keep the door open through the Canadians for any further developments.

"6. Ronning asked Trinh whether the DRV could put forward any new counter-proposal. He inquired, as an example, as to the possibility of an over-all settlement including a ceasefire throughout Vietnam. Trinh said 'This all depends on the US attitude'. Aside from halting its bombing of North Vietnam, which must be done before any talks could be held, the US would have to 'recognize the NLF position,' abide by the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, and withdraw its forces and bases from South Vietnam.

"7. Ronning said that Trinh had referred to the NLF 'Five Points' as among those elements which would have to be accepted by the US but was ambiguous as to whether this would be part of the discussions leading toward an armistice or of a final settlement. He said that he had clarified specifically with both Thach and Trinh that acceptance of the DRV 'Four Points' and a cessation of fighting in South Vietnam were not preconditions for preliminary DRV-US talks. Ronning emphasized the DRV position was that if the US stopped bombing completely, the DRV was prepared to talk.

"8. Trinh did not himself specifically refer to the DRV 'Four Points' per se, although he mentioned individual points in the course of his presentation. (On the day of Ronning's departure, however, Le Thanh of the Foreign Ministry noted specifically to Ronning that the 'Four Points' were also 'an element', one of the problems that would have to be discussed.)

"9. Ronning asked Trinh whether, if the US clarified its position on the NLF, agreed to the withdrawal of its troops, and agreed to abide by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. The DRV would be prepared to enter into negotiations. Trinh said 'It all depended on the US reply, but the current US attitude would have no change.' Ronning emphasized that his entire presentation and his remarks during this part of the conversation with Trinh were extremely general and that he had not attempted in any way to go into details but merely to try and feel out the general nature of the DRV position.



"10. On the final day of the trip, June 17, Le Thanh reiterated to Ronning that the DRV had confidence in Canadian sincerity and good will and wished to keep the door open if the Government of Canada had anything to say. Ronning added he replied that, similarly, if the DRV had anything to say it could contact the Canadian representative on the ICC, Moore.

"11. In response to questions asked by others present at Ambassador Ronning's debriefing, Ronning made the following observations which he did not attribute to specific DRV individuals but which he said had been made during his conversations in Hanoi:

a. The North Vietnamese were confident that the US would eventually bomb Hanoi and Haiphong and lay waste much of North Vietnam. They expected this and were prepared for it. He remarked that on June 15, while he was in Hanoi, there had been an air raid alarm which had sent the population scurrying to many shelters which had been built in the city. He thought an observation plane might have been responsible for the alarm and said he had seen no planes (there was a heavy cloud cover) or heard any bombing. He noted that a US plane was said to have been downed in the suburbs of Hanoi a few days before his arrival and that the diplomatic corps had been taken to see the plane and had been given fragments as souvenirs. The Canadian ICC military representative, however, was not permitted to make this 'excursion'.

b. DRV officials told Ronning that Premier Pham Van Dong was not in Hanoi at the time but did not specify where he was. In response to Ronning's own question as to Ho Chi Minh's whereabouts, officials said Ho was not in Communist China and labeled as 'rumors' reports that he was on such a trip. The question of whether he had been in the CPR was not raised.

c. DRV officials on at least one occasion strongly criticized the Government of Canada for its role on the ICC Commission in Laos.

d. Officials had specifically told Ronning that they would attend a Geneva-type conference on Vietnam. (This presumably came up in the context of the general conditions under which the DRV would agree to negotiations) and observed that they would favor French participation in such a conference.

e. No emphasis was placed in the conversations on the subject of 'reunification' but it was raised by DRV officials in the context of observance of the 1954 Geneva Agreements.

f. DRV officials declined to be drawn out by questions on the relationship of the DRV with the Soviets and the Chinese,



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merely reiterating that both supported North Vietnam and were fraternal countries of the DRV.

"12. Minister of External Affairs Martin asked Ambassador Ronning several times to make clear whether there was any ambiguity in his mind as to whether Hanoi was prepared to 'talk' solely on the basis of an end to the US bombing. Ronning was absolutely convinced there was no ambiguity on this point and that he interpreted DRV reference to be to informal bilateral talks with the US, not to formal negotiations or a Geneva-type conference. Mr. Goldschlag summarized the DRV position as Ronning appeared to have garnered it as a three-stage position: (1) an end to US bombing on DRV terms; (2) informal bilateral DRV-US talks; (3) a multilateral Geneva-type conference. Ronning and Martin agreed this was an accurate summation as the Canadians understood it.

"13. In a subsequent private conversation, Ronning told Kreisberg that he had been totally depressed following his conversation with Trinh and that he had not detected any hint on Trinh's part of a desire to put forward any new or alternative proposals which Ronning might bring back.

"14. At the conclusion of the conversation, Mr. Bundy observed that it was very difficult to perceive where there was any 'handle' by which to grab hold of the views expressed by DRV officials to Ambassador Ronning but that the USG would carefully evaluate Ronning's observations as conveyed during the present meeting.

"15. Comment: Ronning's manner and attitude following his June trip to Hanoi was markedly more sober and subdued than it was after his March trip. In March Ronning clearly felt that he may have gotten some hint of a shift in the DRV position which posed the possibility of further hopeful development. He was anxious at that time for the US to consider urgently its evaluation of the DRV line to the GOC so that some further move might be undertaken. At no point during Ronning's remarks following his June trip to Hanoi did he personally hint at any opening or flexibility in the DRV position or that he had emerged from his current mission with any information which required further consideration and might offer the possibility for yet a third effort. Minister of External Affairs Martin, however, repeatedly emphasized on his side that the DRV had agreed to keep open the Canadian channel and that this was important. Ronning did not demur from this position, and in fact agreed that Hanoi had been willing to keep the channel open but offered no encouragement or suggestion as to how it might be used from here on."



22 June 1966

Attachment to Memorandum for the Record (SECRET/NO. 113); Subject: Dinner Meeting with Paul Martin and Other Canadians, June 21, 1966.

# I. - The Ronning Mission

"A. It was entirely clear at the dinner that all the Canadian participants accepted that Ronning had found no sign of 'give' in Hanoi's position.

"B. While Martin attempted some recriminations in the US handling of the mission, by the close of the discussion we believe these had been dealt with and will not appear in any public discussion by him.

... Martin early in the dinner launched into a complaint that our position had not been forthcoming enough. Mr. Bundy said that we could have taken no other position on a unilateral cessation of bombing, and with this Martin wholly agreed. He then went on to suggest that we might have said something more about the status of the NLF, and Ronning made the suggestion that we might indicate at some point that we were prepared to treat the NLF as a 'belligerent group.' Mr. Bundy argued that any recognition of the NLF as an independent party would prejudice the whole possibility of a stable political settlement in the South and simply could not be contemplated, particularly with the existing political weakness in the South. . . .

Secondly, Martin, and to some degree Ronning, thought that our June 3 press statement on reciprocal reductions of hostilities might have quered the mission. Ronning's account of his mission (covered in Mr. Kreisberg's separate memorandum) had indicated that the DRV representatives had referred to his press statement, and Ronning also thought that they had expected something more forthcoming from his mission. . . . when we had been forced to comment on the Finney leak of June 3 about the Warsaw talks (which Mr. Bundy noted had been forced on us by a Senatorial indiscretion) we were bound to repeat precisely the position that we had always taken, saying that we could consider action concerning the bombing if Hanoi would take reciprocal action, 'for example' relating to infiltration, military activity, and North Vietnamese military personnel in the South. . . .

Thirdly, several of the Canadians wondered what sort of message we might have expected Hanoi to make to the agreed message. Mr. Bundy remarked that we had had one experience with contact who had said that we should watch the military activity and North Vietnamese military presence in the South. . . .



.....

..... there was a long discussion of Hanoi's state of mind. Mr. Bundy expressed the view that Hanoi had dug itself in during December, as their handling of the pause showed, and that the political troubles in the South would seem logically to be encouraging to Hanoi. At the same time, we were getting evidence that our pressures in the South were exerting an effect, and even some third country evidence that the bombing was having a cumulative depressing effect in the North. It was now clearly of vital importance to get the political situation in the South stabilized, and we hoped, established on a democratic basis through the Constitutional elections. If this could be done, Bundy thought that Hanoi might start to show some signs of give in 3-4 months, although he was not sanguine that Hanoi would be ready to call the operation off by the end of the year. ....

## ..... II. - Points Related to Bombing Policy

"At no point did Mr. Bundy refer specifically to any forthcoming operations. However, the course of the discussion permitted several related points to be made and discussed, as follows:

### "A. Possibility of Chinese Intervention

Bundy and Ronning had a long exchange on this, in which virtually total agreement emerged that the Chinese would be highly sensitive to any threat to their own territory and might well react if they concluded that it had become our objective to destroy North Vietnam or eliminate the Communist regime there. ....

### "B. Mr. Bundy specifically said that we had no intention of bombing the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong, or mining the Haiphong Harbor.

Ronning had given an interesting account of the air raid shelters constructed in Hanoi, and Mr. Bundy said flatly that they would not need these shelters. Ronning also expressed grave concern over any US action that tended to throw the North Vietnamese into the arms of the Chinese, which he thought would be disastrous, both in stiffening the North Vietnamese position and in bringing about heavy Chinese influence and eventual control in North Vietnam. Mr. Bundy said that we saw the same danger, and that it was a commitment in our not contemplating the mining of Haiphong.

.....



"c. During the above discussions, Mr. Bundy twice made clear that we might well consider actions within our present policy and within the above analysis of Chicoms reactions.

These references were not picked up by the Canadians, but can hardly have gone unnoticed."

11. 1966  
MAIL 4023 to Amembassy SAIGON; Info: Amembassy OTTAWA 1382.

"1. Canadians (MinExtAff Martin and Ronning) briefed Bundy this week on Ronning's trip to Hanoi June 14-17. . . .

"2. Ronning saw PAVN ICC Liaison officer Ha Van Lao, DRV Vice ForMin Nguyen Go Thach, and ForMin and Vice Premier Nguyen Day Trinh while he was in Hanoi. He did not rpt not see Pham Van Dong or Ho Chi Minh. DRV officials were personally cordial but demonstrated complete inflexibility on matters of policy and put forward no new positions. Hanoi reiterated its demands that the US halt the bombing of the North, withdraw its forces from SVN, 'recognize the position of the NLF' (not otherwise spelled out), and adhere to the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Communist officials maintained they were confident that the Viet Cong would win and expressed their determination to maintain their position despite US bombing of the North.

"3. Ronning expressed concern to DRV officials about US POW's in North Viet-Nam but was given standard Hanoi position that POW's were 'criminals' under DRV law and told that no ICRC protection role would be considered, and provided no detailed information about the prisoners themselves.

"4. FYI: We believe above represents basic position we should pass to GVN and that we should not refer to oral message we agreed have Ronning pass to Hanoi on reciprocal dampening down of hostilities in SVN in exchange for US move on bombing of North. We should know, however, that Hanoi absolutely rejected US message and Trinh told Ronning DRV would pay no rpt no price whatever for halt to bombing. Hanoi also made clear to Ronning that in exchange for total halt to bombing it prepared only to enter into informal bilateral talks of type we had in January this year. Trinh and other DRV officials offered no alternative proposals to Ronning, who told us he had been profoundly depressed by Hanoi's position. . . .

"5. Ronning said at one point in conversation in Hanoi Trinh had accused Canadians of being insincere in their good offices and that Ronning had offered leave immediately. Ronning said he pulled back from his earlier position and agreed it useful



for DRV to maintain existence of 'Canadian channel' but that even he probably now persuaded there no current prospect of effective approach to Hanoi.

"6. Bundy took opportunity of long dinner conversation with Martin, Ronning, and other senior ExtAff officials to review current US position and view of future in Viet-Nam. Ronning seemed more responsive to our approach than we had seen him before but Martin clearly remains determined to find some role for Canada in peace-making efforts in future. END FYI."

RUSK (Drafted by P. H. Kreisberg)

June 28, 1966

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION (SECRET/EXDIS); Subject: Ronning Mission; Participants: Mr. Roger Duzer, Counselor, Embassy of the French Republic; Mr. Peter M. Roberts, Counselor, Embassy of Canada; Mr. Paul H. Kreisberg, OIC, Mainland China Affairs, ACA.

"1. Mr. Duzer showed me a French telegram from Hanoi which dealt with the Ronning mission. The telegram stated that an unnamed Eastern European Embassy in Hanoi had briefed the AFP correspondent in Hanoi, Raffaelli, last week on the Ronning mission. The AFP man was told: (1) Ronning transmitted a USG message to Hanoi offering a halt in US bombing of North Vietnam in exchange for reciprocal reduction in Viet Cong hostilities in South Vietnam; (2) Hanoi had categorically rejected this proposal, indicating that they would pay no price for a halt to the 'completely unjustified' US bombing of North Vietnam; (3) Ronning had raised the question of US POWs and had been told emphatically that they were criminals and that there was no question of a protecting authority being designated; and (4) nevertheless the DRV was prepared to keep the Canadian channel open for future contacts. The French telegram assumed that the briefing must have been passed with DRV approval and suggested that the story had been leaked in order to indicate that North Vietnam, while not willing to accept the proposals carried by Ronning, was not completely intransigent and was prepared to talk with peace emissaries.

"2. Duzer pressed me on the accuracy of the briefing described in the telegram. I told him that this was a Canadian matter and that any specific comment on the content of the Ronning mission would have to come from the Government of Canada.

"3. After Duzer left, Canadian Counselor Peter Roberts, by coincidence visited me in my office and I informed him, with cautions as to the sensitivity of the information in terms of its source, of the message the French had received. I told him that I wanted it to be perfectly clear that, in the event AFP carried